THE RAGTIMER

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 1973

PUBLISHED BY
THE RAGTIME SOCIETY

DEDICATED TO THE
PRESERVATION OF
CLASSICAL RAGTIME

FINAL NOTICE

1973 - RENEWAL OF MEMBERSHIP - $5.00

Membership renewals are overdue as of January 1, 1973. Members, who have not as yet renewed for 1973, are urged to do so immediately. We want you to continue your membership.

RECORDS FOR SALE

As a service to members, THE RAGTIME SOCIETY Inc. is currently in a position to fill orders for the following records. All prices quoted include charge for postage.

EUBIE BLAKE MUSIC - $6.00 each

EBM #1 - Eubie Blake Featuring Ivan Harold Browning

This disc brings together for the first time on a record Eubie Blake and Ivan Harold Browning, the leading man in Eubie's first Broadway musical, the 1921 Shuffle Along. Together, they revive two numbers from that show: Good Night Angeline and Love Will Find A Way. With Eubie at the piano, Browning authentically reprises a varied selection of period pieces including Jungle Nights In Gay Montmartre, a carefree twenties type jump tune for which he wrote the lyrics. Eubie provides some old and new piano rags including Fizz Water, Dictys On 7th Ave., and Novelty Rag.

EBM #2 - Eubie Blake: From Rags To Classics

Eubie Blake - at ninety - is the last surviving pioneer of the ragtime era. On this recording he plays two of his latest compositions (1972): Classical Rag and Valse Marion. Also included are a 1971 recording of his famous Charleston Rag (composed in 1899) back to back with the rare 1921 version of the same piece. A startling comparison: Eubie Blake playing - fifty years apart!! Other previously never recorded piano solos - Capricious Harlem; Butterfly - show another facet of Eubie Blake, the composer. These pieces, written in the classical European tradition, are in direct contrast to his definitive renditions of such favorites as Junk Man Rag and Pork And Beans.

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RAGTIME...
UNDER YOUR HAT

THE RAGTIME SOCIETY
INCORPORATED

is a non - profit corporation having the following objects:

To preserve classical ragtime music and to pursue such other activities as shall serve to maintain and develop interest in classical ragtime music and music related thereto.

NOTICE

We have been assigned a new POSTAL CODE. Please include the code number when writing to the SOCIETY as follows: THE RAGTIME SOCIETY Inc., P. O. Box 520, Weston, Ontario, Canada, M9N 3N3.

To facilitate handling please direct all mail to the SOCIETY rather than to individuals.

We are a little out of breath from our attempt to have the 1972 issues of THE RAGTIMER focus adequate attention on the tenth anniversary celebrations of the SOCIETY.

Now we turn to the future. There has been an excellent response from the membership in terms of renewals for 1973. This issue contains a final notice about overdue renewals. The next issue, along with the 1973 membership card, is mailed to subscribing members in good standing only.

We hope that members, as in the past, will continue to send in original personal contributions, articles, press clippings and information of interest to ragtimers.

Again we apologize for our failure, from time to time, to reply with deserving acknowledgements. Please be assured that your contributions of material, ideas and suggestions are all considered and either acted on or held for future reference. It is a debatable fault, that we put regular publication of THE RAGTIMER ahead of correspondence for the first claim on time.

THE RAGTIMER is delighted to join with the SOCIETY in wishing "A HAPPY 90th BIRTHDAY to EUBIE BLAKE." Eubie was born in Baltimore on February 7, 1883. We are grateful to the many members who have sent in material about this illustrious ragtimer. Robert Kimball sent us a copy of his exhaustive article written with William Bolcom and published in Stereo

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(Reprinted from The Sun Magazine Baltimore, MD. October 15, 1972)

THE ROARING RAGTIME ODYSSEY OF EUBIE BLAKE

By WILLIAM HYDER

What began in Baltimore in 1889 has reached Broadway and the Dick Cavett Show

One night in 1889 an East Baltimore woman named Emma Blake, shopping for groceries among the stalls and farm wagons that lined South Broadway, noticed that her 6-year-old son had wandered away. She finally found him in a nearby music store.

The child had been watching through the window as the salesman demonstrated a pump organ for a customer. Fascinated, he ventured into the shop and (as he explained later) "tried to make the organ work." He fingered the keys, but no music came out because he hadn't pumped any air in.

At this point Mrs. Blake entered and the salesman went to work: "Your son has great talent. He should have an instrument to practice on." Over her protests he placed a $75 Weaver organ in the Blake home at $1 down and 25 cents a week for an unspecified period.

To a poor black family the debt was staggering, but the sales talk, ironically, turned out to be accurate. Mrs. Blake's son did prove to be a musical prodigy, and grew up to compose 5 Broadway shows and about 300 songs, among them "I'm Just Wild About Harry" and "Memories Of You."

Today, nearing 90, Eubie Blake is still composing and busier than ever as a pianist. In recent months he has given a recital at New York's Town Hall (the Times reviewer called him "a well-disciplined performer who played with zest, sparkle and authority"), appeared on Dick Cavett's TV show and performed on college campuses from coast to coast. Later this month he will sail to Europe to perform at the Berlin Jazz Festival.

Mr. Blake lives in Brooklyn, N. Y., in a street of well-kept brownstone houses. His second wife, the former Marion Tyler, began as a dancer in Broadway musicals and worked for years as secretary to W. C. Handy, composer of "The St. Louis Blues." She acts as her husband's business manager, booking his appearances and making sure he gets enough rest in between (something the energetic Mr. Blake is careless about).

THE RAGTIME SOCIETY INC.

AND ITS MEMBERS JOIN IN CONGRATULATING

Eubie Blake

ON HIS 90th BIRTHDAY
FEBRUARY 7, 1973

TEMPO DI RAGTIME

HAPPY BIRTHDAY EUBIE BLAKE

Mr. Blake greets visitors in a comfortable basement studio hung with awards and citations. Against one wall is a Steinway studio grand piano, its lid covered with books and music. He is a small, modest man, unmistakably Baltimorean (he pronounces "idea" with the accent on the first syllable).

"My father and mother were slaves in Virginia," he says. After the Civil War, John Sumner Blake and Emily Johnston moved to Baltimore, where they met and married. They had 11 children. All died in infancy except the youngest, James Hubert Blake. "My mother always said I was my father's birthday present," Mr. Blake recalls, "because I was born on his birthday." The date was February 7th, 1883.

The success, longevity and good health Mr. Blake enjoys were gained in the face of overwhelming odds. Baltimore in the Eighties was crowded with blacks who had migrated from the South. Their large numbers kept wages low. Most lived in tiny, overcrowded row houses, built cheaply and without regard to sanitation. (Many of these are still standing and still inhabited). Rickets and sore eyes were common among the children, tuberculosis almost as common among the adults.

The elder Mr. Blake brought home $9 a week as boss of a gang of stevedores, but in bad weather there was no work, no pay and sometimes no food in the house. His wife helped by taking in washing. Mr. Blake remembers her bending over her washtub, her hands wrinkled by hot water and caked with washing soda. For comfort she turned to churchgoing.

When the Weaver organ came into the house little Hubie taught himself to play by ear. At 9 he got his first formal music lessons from Margaret Marshall, a highschool girl who lived next door. She asked 25 cents a week. Often the Blakes didn't have it, but Margaret would give the lesson anyway.

Hubie picked up a knowledge of the cornet from a friend named Howard (Hop) Johns. Hop was a member of the Monumental City Guards Band, a black organization that played for parades, torchlight processions, excursions and funerals. When he was about 12 Hubie joined the band as third cornet. He didn't last long. In the middle of a Sousa march he would scandalize the leader, Cap Harris, by playing hot licks in the new ragtime style.

Most respectable people, black and white, joined Cap Harris in disapproving of ragtime. It was a case of guilt by association. Black musicians were barred from working with white musicians in concert halls, opera houses and theater orchestras. The only work they could find was playing the piano in saloons and sporting houses. After hours they developed new styles of their own - ragtime and (a little later) jazz. This music grew up in immoral places, said the respectable world; therefore, it had to be immoral itself.

Hubie attended the Primary School No. 2, a segregated institution in the 200 block of East Street. "I got kicked out in the eighth grade for something - I don't have to lie now - I didn't do." Wandering the streets of East Baltimore, he found himself drawn to where the music was. He heard many talented black pianists and learned from them.

When he was about 16 a neighbor brought his mother some shocking news: "Sister

Blake, I heard somebody playing up at Aggie Sheldon's, sound just like little Hubie." It was true. Hubie had been working there for several weeks. He would wait until his parents were asleep and climb out his bedroom window. Mrs. Sheldon, whom Mr. Blake remembers as "a big blonde German woman," had a well-to-do clientele. Hubie would return every morning before dawn with $10 or $15 in tips.

Mrs. Blake was shattered. "What am I going to tell Brother Reid?" Her husband was more realistic: "Preacher don't bring no money into this house." He asked Hubie how much he was making, and the boy lifted the oilcloth on the living-room floor to show the bank notes he had hidden. The elder Mr. Blake, thinking of all the years he had sweated on the waterfront for $9 a week, approved his son's new career.

Around this time - 1899 - Mr. Blake turned out his first composition, an intricate piano piece called "The Charleston Rag." Things were better for the Blakes financially and the elder Mr. Blake, now in his sixties, was able to retire. Hubie had enough money to indulge the great love of his life: the theater. He saw every show and every performer he could and, inevitably, went on the stage himself.

He joined a traveling medicine show run by a veterinarian named Dr. Frazier, and made his debut in Fairfield, Pa., on July 4, 1901, playing the melodion and doing a buck and wing on the back of a wagon. The following year he traveled as far as New York city with a show called "In Old Kentucky."

Mr. Blake didn't like New York and came home to play the piano in saloons around East Baltimore. In 1905 he settled at the Middle Section Assembly Club at 1108 East Lexington Street, a black-owned establishment which had been founded around 1892, survived the First and Second World Wars and finally went out of business in the Fifties. Two years later he moved to the Goldfield Hotel at East Lexington and Chesnut (now Colvin) Streets, built by Baltimore's Joe Gans, the black lightweight boxing champion of the world. He stayed at the Goldfield until 1915, occasionally taking time off to play at clubs in Atlantic City.

When Mr. Blake began working in sporting houses and saloons he cut himself off from the hard-working, church-going families that inhabited his mother's world. "The two kinds of people did not mix," he declares. He became engaged to the granddaughter of a respected patriarch named Draper Lee, and recalls "Everybody said 'Oh, my God, I hear that Eubie Blake's going to marry Avis Lee. I wonder how he met her?' " They were married in Atlantic City in 1910. "She died in 1939," Mr. Blake says, "and until she died, nobody in Baltimore ever called her Avis Blake - always Avis Lee."

Mr. Blake's love for the theater continued to grow. He saw Leslie Stuart's "Florodora," which introduced him to European operetta, and he began to study the styles of such composers as Oskar Straus, Franz Lehar and the American Victor Herbert.

He was particularly interested in the Negro operettas that were appearing on Broadway and touring the country. The earliest ones starred Bert Williams and his partner George Walker - "In Dahomey" (1903), "In Abyssinia" (1906) and "In Bandanna Land" (1908). A later series was created by the black poet James Weldon Johnson, J. Rosamond Johnson, his composer brother, and Bob Cole. Their works include "The Shoo Fly Regiment" (1907) and "The Red Moon" (1909).

Inspired by the success of these shows, Mr. Blake determined to become a theatrical composer. But around 1910 black operettas began to disappear from Broadway. That year Jack Johnson became the first black heavyweight boxing champion of the world, arousing racial hysteria in many whites. Feelings ran so high that Broadway producers decided that black shows were no longer good investments.

"I made up my mind," Mr. Blake says, "to put Negros back on Broadway." To prepare himself he began studying harmony, composition and orchestration with W. Llewellyn Wilson, a bandmaster who, years later, organized and conducted a black symphony orchestra sponsored by the City of Baltimore.

In 1914 his first published music appeared - two piano rags called "Fizz Water" and "Chevy Chase." Both carried the credit line "J. Hubert Blake (Eubie)." (Mr. Blake's childhood nickname, Hubie, had gradually melted into Eubie, and he eventually adopted Eubie Blake as his professional name).

The following summer the pattern of Mr. Blake's life changed completely. A band called Joe Porter's Serenaders was booked to play at the old Riverview Park.

Mr. Blake then signed on as the pianist, and Porter brought a singer named Noble Sissle down from New York. Learning that Mr. Sissle was a lyric writer as well as a singer, Mr. Blake explained his plan to write a black operetta. The two men joined forces with a handshake. After 57 years they are still partners.

Noble Lee Sissle was born in Indianapolis in 1889 and graduated from Butler College. ("He went to white schools all the time," Mr. Blake smiles. "He says I talk with a dialect"). Before meeting Mr. Blake he toured with the Thomas Jubilee Singers, worked as a band vocalist and conducted his own dance orchestra at the Severin Hotel in Indianapolis.

When the Riverview Park engagement ended Mr. Sissle went with James Reese Europe, a black musician who had come to prominence as band leader for the ballroom-dancing team of Vernon and Irene Castle. Europe was now heading an orchestra that played at New York society affairs. At Mr. Sissle's suggestion, he invited Mr. Blake to join his organization.

At the age of 32 Mr. Blake left his home town for good. He hadn't liked New York on his first visit in 1902, and although his career has kept him there since 1915 he still doesn't like it. He remains a Baltimorean at heart, and has returned home for visits as often as he could. Before leaving he bought his widowed mother a house at 915 North Rutland Avenue. "It sounds ridiculous today," he says, "but I paid $800 for it - $400 down and $50 a month."

Working with Europe's band, Sissle and Blake became a performing as well as a song-writing team. They contrasted well in personality and appearance. Mr. Sissle, tall, handsome and urbane, did the vocals; the tiny Mr. Blake, with his pixie sense of humor, accompanied and occasionally joined in. Dressed in tuxedos, they performed in drawing rooms and ballrooms for such New York millionaire families as the Wanamakers, the Goulds, the Vanderbilts and the Astors.

In 1919 Jim Europe died suddenly and Sissle and Blake approached the Keith circuit about going into vaudeville. The Keith people were interested, but wanted to dress them in grotesque costumes and turn them into shuffling, dull-witted stereotypes. After 50 years Mr. Blake still gets angry when he thinks of it. Fortunately the partners had a tough Irish agent named Pat Casey, who threatened to take all his clients away from Keith's unless Sissle and Blake were allowed to do their act in their own way.

The team opened in New Haven and then played the Harlem Opera House in upper Manhattan. Here they did so well that instead of being sent out on the Keith circuit to build up a reputation, they were booked directly into vaudeville's top spot, the Palace Theater in New York.

Now Mr. Blake composed the operetta he had been dreaming about for so long. Mr. Sissle wrote the lyrics and Flournoy Miller and Aubrey Lyles, a black vaudeville team noted for creating their own material, supplied the book. On a budget of $700 they rented the disused 63rd Street Theater, hired a cast and devised costumes and scenery.

"Shuffle Along" opened on May 23, 1921. Mr. Blake conducted and his three collaborators were in the cast. Among the chorus girls were Florence Mills and Josephine Baker, who soon became stars, and the orchestra included Hall Johnson (later conductor of the Hall Johnson Choir) and the black symphonic composer William Grant Still.

The hit songs of the show were "Love Will Find A Way" and "I'm Just Wild About Harry." Mr. Blake wrote "Harry" in waltz time but turned it into a two-step when his leading lady, Lottie Gee, protested "You can't have a waltz in a colored show."

"Shuffle Along" ran for 18 months and then went on tour. At one time there were three companies on the road. One of them conducted by Mr. Blake, visited Baltimore for a gala performance at Ford's Theater. On this occasion blacks, usually restricted to the upper balcony, occupied the boxes and a few rows of the first balcony.

Many of Mr. Blake's old friends were in the audience, and after the show they crowded backstage to congratulate him. One of them approached Mr. Blake's mother, who was standing apart from the group, and remarked that her son's achievement was something to be proud of. "Some see it that way," Mrs. Blake replied austerely, "but he might have done it for Jesus instead."

After "Shuffle Along" closed, Sissle and Blake accepted an offer to tour the English music halls. During their stay in England they contributed some numbers to London revues. One of them became the first song Noel Coward and Gertrude Lawrence ever sang together on the stage.

Back in New York they collaborated on another musical, "The Chocolate Dandies," which played at the Colonial Theater and toured for eight months. In 1927 Mr. Sissle formed an orchestra and took it to Paris for the American Legion Convention. While his partner was away Mr. Blake wrote songs with other collaborators and, in 1930, composed the scores for "Folies Bergere" (lyrics by Will Morrissey) and "Blackbirds of 1930" (lyrics by Andy Razaf). The latter show starred Ethel Waters and included another of Mr. Blake's lasting hits, "Memories Of You."

In 1932 came a new edition of "Shuffle Along" and in 1937 Mr. Blake wrote the score of a musical called "Swing It," produced by the Work Projects Administration of the federal government. During World War II he toured military camps and hospitals for five years as conductor of USO shows. In 1945 he married his present wife and moved into her Brooklyn home ("I got the coop with the chicken," he told Dick Cavett on TV).

The next year, at 63, he "retired," but before long he enrolled at New York University to study the Schillinger system (a method of applying mathematics to musical composition to minimize the element of trial and error). Then a movement sprang up that put an end to his retirement for good.

In the late Forties a few young white jazz pianists revived the ragtime style. A history by Rudi Blesh called "They All Played Ragtime" was published in 1950, and Mr. Blake figured in it prominately. Soon he found himself being sought out as a performer, lecturer and source of information. The book (still in print and in its fourth revised edition) has become the bible of the ragtime revival, and Mr. Blake has been in increasing demand.

In 1969 Columbia Records released a two-record album called "The Eighty-Six Years Of Eubie Blake." It presented a panorama of his music - ragtime, operetta, musical comedy and pop songs - played by Mr. Blake, with vocals by himself and Mr. Sissle. After this he became busier than ever.

In the past few years the ragtime revival has spread to concert pianists and musicologists. This serious interest has prompted Mr. Blake to set up his own recording company, Eubie Blake Music - not for profit, but to create a permanent record of his music and that of other black composers and performers, He has released one album and has two more on the way.

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ADVANCE NOTICE

THE 9th ANNUAL RAGTIME SOCIETY BASH - 1973

To be held at the CARA INN
Toronto, on the weekend of
Saturday, October 13, 1973

This will mean three years in a row at the same location - with the general duplication of accomodation

RESERVE THE DATE NOW ON YOUR
CALENDAR OF "MUST" EVENTS
FOR THE FALL SEASON

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Continued from Page 2.

EUBIE BLAKE MUSIC - $6.00 each

EBM #3 - Eubie Blake And His Friends: Edith Wilson & Ivan Harold Browning.

Blues singer, Edith Wilson, makes her first appearance on records since her extensive recording career of the twenties. Accompanied by Eubie Blake, she recreates in stereo three of her popular hits: He May Be Your Man (But He Comes To See Me Sometimes), There'll Be Some Changes Made and Black And Blue. Ivan Harold Browning, vocal artist on their first record, performs a selection of spirituals including Joshua Fit The Battle Of Jericho; and also, a medley from Sissle & Blake's Shuffle Along. In addition to providing integral piano backup for his two friends, Eubie solos on five numbers: from blues - Memphis Blues - to a new rag, Eubie Dubie.

SHEET MUSIC

The back cover of this issue of THE RAGTIMER pictures OPERA HOUSE RAG by Robert R. Darch, arranged by Joseph F. Lamb. This item is listed in our catalogue as CM-609. The story of Piper's Opera House at Virginia City, site of the Comstock Lode discovery, is also told in this issue of THE RAGTIMER.

In addition to the foregoing, members interested in sheet music are reminded to check carefully the offerings in the last issue of THE RAGTIMER (Nov. / Dec. 1972) on pages 2, 6 and 7.

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RAGTIME...UNDER YOUR HAT Cont'd. from Page 3.

Review (Nov. 1972) called "The Words And Music Of Noble Sissle & Eubie Blake". Watch for their new book "Reminiscing With Sissle And Blake", which The Viking Press plans to release on Eubie's 90th birthday February 7th, 1973. For this issue of THE RAGTIMER we have chosen to use an article sent in by William Hyder which was published in THE SUN MAGAZINE BALTIMORE, MD. on October 15th, 1972. It seems appropriate that William Hyder should tell us about his fellow Baltimorean, James Hubert Blake. See Page 2 of this issue of THE RAGTIMER for particulars on the two new record releases EBM-2 and EBM-3 by Eubie Blake Music.

Entertainer Steve Spracklin of Joplin, Mo. dropped in on us at Toronto in December enroute between engagements. It was an enjoyable occasion. Steve also visited with Bob Darch and Don Ewell during his short stay.

Welcome to a new member of the SOCIETY, Tom Gordon, who resides in Sedalia, Missouri. Just the mention of the name, Sedalia, makes the mind's eye gaze back to an historical moment of ragtime in 1899 when Scott Joplin and John Stark conducted their transaction concerning a certain musical composition called "Maple Leaf Rag."

SCOTT JOPLIN REDISCOVERED - PART 4

In connection with the Concert of Music by Scott Joplin held on Friday, October 22, 1971, which was made the subject of Scott Joplin Rediscovered - Part 3, a souvenir program brochure was prepared. The following is a reprint contained therein of the biographical sketch, in capsule form, of SCOTT JOPLIN.

THE COMPOSER

"What is scurrilously called ragtime is an invention that is here to stay. That is now conceded by all classes of musicians. That all publications masquerading under the name of ragtime are not the genuine article will be better known when these exercises are studied. That real ragtime of the higher class is rather difficult to play is a painful truth which most pianists have discovered. Syncopations are no indication of light or trashy music, and to shy bricks at 'hateful ragtime' no longer passes for musical culture. To assist players in giving the 'Joplin Rags' that weird and intoxicating effect intended by the composer is the object of this work." Scott Joplin, The School Of Ragtime 1908.

Ragtime, the musical phenomenon that swept the nation like wildfire in the late 1890s, created an impact probably not again equalled until the rock mania of our own time. Its immense popularity lasted only until the end of World War One, when it gave way to, or rather was absorbed by, jazz, but, in spite of a short life-span and its corruption by the commercial tune-smiths of Tin Pan Alley, the ragtime era produced some music of enduring value and at least one composer of unquestionable genius.

Scott Joplin, known as the "King of Ragtime," was a serious artist who elevated ragtime from a purely vernacular music of the honky-tonks and sporting houses to the status of a valid art form. With the current revival of interest in ragtime, and particularly in Joplin, his piano pieces, mostly neglected for the past fifty years, are now being equated with the short works in dance forms by Mozart, Chopin, Schubert, and Brahms. Although he observed the conventional formal restrictions of ragtime style, Joplin's creative flow of melodic, poetic, and rhythmic inspiration, and his meticulous and elegant workmanship, place him in a unique position, not only as a composer of superb ragtime, but as an important figure in the panorama of American music.

HIS EARLY LIFE

Born in post-Civil War Texarkana, Texas in 1868, Scott Joplin, a member of a musical family, taught himself as a child to improvise so remarkably on the piano that a German musician in the town volunteered to give him free lessons in piano and harmony, possibly contributing the basis for Joplin's lifelong commitment to education.

In his early teens, Joplin left home to become an itinerant pianist, playing in the red-light districts of towns in Texas, Louisiana, and the Mississippi Valley. By 1885 he had come to St. Louis, then a furiously wide-open town, where the saloons, gambling hells, and "parlors" rang with the raucous sounds of primitive ragtime (then called jig-piano - it was not officially to be called ragtime until 1897), played by the unique breed of Negro pianists that had sprung up, together with the new music. Joplin became a part of this world - indeed virtually the only world in which a black musician might function at

the time.

THE BEGINNINGS OF RAGTIME

In 1894 Joplin settled in Sedalia, Missouri, where he continued his employment in the honky-tonks, but also he began the serious study of advanced harmony and composition, and in 1895 his first published works appeared, two rather sentimental songs. By 1897 he had composed his first important rag, published in 1899 as 'Original Rags.' Later in 1899 came the epoch-making publication of 'Maple Leaf Rag' (named after a favorite Sedalia resort, The Maple Leaf Club) by John Stark, a Sedalia music dealer and publisher. The phenomenal success of 'Maple Leaf Rag' - it sold more than a million copies - marked a turning point in the lives of both men, who were to become close friends and successful colleagues for many years. It also changed the direction of American popular music. The ragtime craze was on.

Freed from financial pressures by 'Maple Leaf' royalties, Joplin abandoned the honky-tonks. He married Belle Hayden in 1900 and moved to St. Louis where, a quiet and serious man, he settled down to composition and teaching. From this time on, he turned out a succession of piano pieces - mostly rags, but also waltzes (some of them syncopated) and marches - that are extraordinary in their beauty, sublety, and consistently exquisite craftmanship. He also composed works in collaboration with gifted colleagues: Scott Hayden, Arthur Marshall, and Louis Chauvin.

Upon the unhappy termination of his marriage, he moved to New York in 1907. Billed as the "King of Ragtime," he toured in vaudeville, cut several piano rolls of his own works, and continued to compose memorable music. In 1909 he married Lottie Stokes and they settled permanently in New York, where Mrs. Joplin ran a theatrical and musical boarding house while Joplin continued to compose and teach.

MUSIC FOR THE THEATRE

Although primarily a composer for the piano, Joplin had been thinking in terms of the music theatre. His first attempt at a "stage work," 'The Ragtime Dance' published in 1902, is an extended song with choreography, in which the singer "calls the figures" while the dancers execute the steps indicated in the text. In 1903 his unpublished ragtime opera 'A Guest Of Honor' received one performance in St. Louis; it was copyrighted the same year. The score disappeared shortly afterwards and has never been found.

Joplin's second opera 'Treemonisha' published at his own expense in 1911, represents both the ultimate aspiration and the tragedy of his life. Without doubt, he considered it his crowning achievement. Apart from being the first grand opera by a black American, this full-scale work in three acts is remarkable for the extraordinary quality of its folk-like music as well as its ragtime passages, and for Joplin's theme: that only through education would his people achieve their own salvation. In 1915 an informal run-through without staging at a small Harlem hall, with Joplin accompanying the singers at the piano, brought a disappointingly indifferent response from an uncomprehending audience. Nevertheless, he persisted in completing the orchestration, determined to see the opera produced. The orchestration, never published, was lost. The work still remains unproduced.

PIPER'S OPERA HOUSE

(Name source for "Opera House Rag" by Bob Darch / Joe Lamb)

The great gold and silver mining camp of Virginia City, Nevada, was founded in 1859 with the discovery of the fabulous Comstock Lode and within fifteen years was second only to San Francisco as a radiant theatre town. For three decades it boasted some of the foremost impresarios of the land. It paid top salaries and it adored its favorites.

In 1863 Thomas Maguire opened the predecessor of Piper's Opera House on "D" Street. In addition to its opulent theatre decor it contained a spacious bar and billiard room, a gaming parlor, carpets on the floor and wonderful crystal chandeliers.

At Maguire's, part of whose foundation still remains, there appeared such nationally known figures of the time as Artemus Ward, whose monumental carouse with Mark Twain who was then a member of the staff of the Territorial Enterprise was written into Virginia City history, and Adah Isaacs Menken, then at the height of her notoriety for her performance in Mazeppa in whose climatic scene she actually wore flesh colored tights!

Although his affairs on the Comstock prospered Maguire hankered to return to San Francisco, and gradually his place was taken by John Piper, an eminent Virginia City saloon keeper and sporting man. Beginning in 1864 Piper gradually bought his way into the Maguire enterprises. With Piper's accession to the eminence thus vacated the Comstock entered its golden age of entertainment.

Piper's theatrical activities maintained considerable continuity with the pattern first set by Maguire. He continued Maguire's own resident company of permanent players who supplemented the stars and name personalities brought in from outside.

Piper's "D" Street opera house burned to the ground in the Great Fire of 1875, and Piper, along with most of the other property owners of the Comstock excepting the owners of the mines which were safe underground, was bankrupt. In his extremity he turned to his old friend Maguire who promptly ponied up $50,000 and for his new playhouse Piper chose the northwest corner of "B" and Union Streets, the present location.

The second Piper's Opera House was ready for occupancy in the first weeks of 1878. Virginia City had by now outgrown its boomtown brashness and was celebrated as the richest per capita community in the world.

The new Piper's seated 900 patrons and boasted a stage fifty four feet wide and thirty eight feet deep which lent itself to the production of spectacular melodramas with involved scenic and mechanical effects. It had large, comfortable seats in the dress circle and excellent side lines and four boxes which were usually in requisition for such local nabobs as John Mackay, Jim Fair, Isaac Requa and Adolph Sutro.

In the brief five years of this opera house's life most of the great names of the English speaking stage appeared there; Robert Ingersoll, the famous agnostic, Edwin Booth, Salvini the Younger, Joe Jefferson, Buffalo Bill Cody and his troupe, and

numberless minstrel shows, pretty girl shows, and run of the mine lecturers and performers.

Piper's was never dark. Ole Bull and Eduard Remenyi came up on the steam cars to delight the town's music lovers; Henry Ward Beecher and Henry George alternated with Hermann the Wizard and the Faker of Bordeaux.

Late in the night of March 12, 1883, long after John Piper had retired to his quarters in the theatre itself, a saloon swamper and a night watchman spied smoke curling from under the eaves of Piper's and pulled the fire alarm. Then knowing Piper was inside, they entered the building and rescued him just as the flames burst from the flies.

Again Piper was bankrupt, for although his gate receipts had seldom been less than $1,000 a night all his profits had gone back into the business, most of them eaten up by the cost of importing celebrities.

But Virginia City would not let Piper down, and soon there was a dazzling series of benefit shows, testimonial dinners, and subscription dances; all the devices known to a grateful community to raise funds for a fellow citizen and have fun doing it.

So was the third and final Piper's built, the one that stands today. Because of a stringent shortage of funds the interior decor was sadly lacking in the plush, gilt, ormola and crystal so dear to the Victorian's heart. The slanting floor of the raked stage, the only one remaining in existence anywhere, gave rise, of course, to the theater term "to upstage."

The official opening took place in March, 1885, and nearly two months later the first play in the structure was attended by a gala audience, the bill being the Atkinson Stock Company's production of "Peck's Bad Boy."

The affairs of Piper's in the final years of the nineteenth century followed the graphs of the American theatrical road and the Comstock of which it had been one of the proudest ornaments, both in the long decline toward ultimate oblivion. But Piper's is still there for a generation that never knew stock or attended a performance of "East Lynne" or "The Streets Of New York" to see and admire, which it does in countless thousands every summer. No longer tenable as a playhouse, it is maintained by Ed Zimmer, whose father once played an erratic fiddle in the orchestra, as a museum of Comstock memories.

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RUSSELL J. STETTLER

We are sorry to report the death of a popular member of the SOCIETY, R. J. STETTLER of Allentown, Pa.

Russell died November 1st, 1972. We wish to express our sympathy to his widow Helen Stettler, who was present with him at our 8th Annual Bash a month earlier.

LETTERS

Letters are welcome from members. Excerpts believed to be of general interest are passed along in this section of THE RAGTIMER.

Great Bash, as usual!!

M. H. Schwimmer

(Ed. Comment - Members who are looking for piano rolls of the ragtime classics can obtain many recut versions, produced by John Malone of California and Hal Boulware of St. Louis, from SOCIETY member Mike Schwimmer. The rags cover a wide range of composers: Joplin, Scott, Lamb, Hampton, Hunter, Johnson, Krell, Turpin, Mathews, Marshall, Blake, Pratt, Lodge, Thompson, Botsford, Wenrich and others. Interested members should write to:

M. H. Schwimmer,
241 Harbor St.,
Glencoe, Ill. 60022
U. S. A.

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We really enjoyed the Ragtime Festival. We're certainly looking forward to future bashes.

Bronson Wolf,
Detroit, Mich.
U. S. A.

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Thanks for the good time we had at the bash.

Mr. & Mrs. Leland Erickson,
Rochester, N. Y.
U. S. A.

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The Bash was just great and the arrangements ideal.

Ben Conroy,
Austin, Texas.
U. S. A.

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I think your publication is excellent and I await it with avid interest. Keep it up.

Hank Ross,
Riverdale, N. Y.
U. S. A.

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It's great to have the Reprint Club going again.

W. E. Mitchell,
Downey, California.
U. S. A.

(Ed. Comment - Our thanks to Bill Mitchell for a complimentary copy of his latest record RAGTIME RECYCLED - Ethlyd Record ER1750. It is a fine effort with Bill at the piano backed by Doug. Parker, banjo; Hal Smith, Jr., percussion; and Paul Woltz, tuba. The review and particulars concerning this record will be found in Tex Wyndham's Record Review in this issue.)

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I much enjoyed seeing TREEMONISHA performed at Wolf Trap, in August, to a packed house. The show had some weak places and some very good ones. If Joplin had lived, I'm sure he'd have tightened it up.

Harry H. Fletcher,
Falls Church, Virginia.
U. S. A.

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We just received your publications and really enjoy them. I especially like the article pertaining to the history of ragtime.

Mrs. Ivan Shapiro,
Anniston, Alabama.
U. S. A.

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As promised, I am sending along a copy of the special BILLBOARD edition of Sept. 30, 1972 spotlighting "Canada's New Musical Image" for the Ragtime Society's records.

Jerry Vogel,
New York, N. Y.
U. S. A.

(Ed. Comment - Jerry has been a very helpful member of the SOCIETY in keeping us informed about available rags from his enormous catalogue of rags and songs. Jerry heads the Jerry Vogel Music Company, Inc. - Cable Address "Tinpanally New York". Jerry has spent 63 years in Tin Pan Alley starting in 1910.)

Jerry expresses it this way:

"... a 63-year love affair with the music business.

When I first started in as a song plugger (later to become a music publisher) two street cars ran up and down Broadway - the Red line and the Green line. The Hotel Astor and the Hotel Knickerbocker were the two brightest spots of Times Square - which was a different Times Square than we know today.

And - would you believe it? - there were 60 legitimate show houses on Broadway that year! Yes - ON Broadway! I'm not talking about off Broadway or off-off Broadway.

The big vaudeville houses were Hammerstein's on 42nd Street and Broadway, and William Morris' Music Hall at 42nd Street and 8th Avenue. The Palace Theater was just coming into popularity, soon to eclipse Hammerstein's and Morris' as the dream of every big-time vaudevilian."

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I have just finished reading the excellent summary of the first ten years of THE RAGTIME SOCIETY, - a superb job - it required a lot of time on research and investigation - The subject is well covered.

John A. Fisher,
Toronto, Ontario.
Canada.

Thanks for the mention of the efforts of Russ Cassidy and myself in your last issue of THE RAGTIMER (re the contribution made to ragtime by The Ragtime Review of St. Louis 1962 to 1966)

Trebor Jay Tichenor,
St. Louis, Missouri.
U. S. A.

(Ed. Comment - The prompt response from two men who have given so much of themselves to ragtime, supplies the kind of abstract encouragement that gives us the spark to carry on with the work they began so many years ago.)

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RECORD REVIEW

by
TEX
WYNDHAM

A number of Lps are currently available which present ragtime in something other than the familiar solo piano context. Many of these have escaped comment in this column, and this vaccuum is about to be filled.

Arcane 602 'Silks and Rags', by The Dawn Of The Century Ragtime Orchestra

Selections: America, I Love You; Coon Hollow Capers; Hyacinth Rag; Friendship Cafe Rag; Cotton Time; King Crap; Bombasto March; Yankee Girl; Ramshackle Rag; Silks and Rags Waltzes; Eli Green's Cakewalk; Raggy Trombone; Bohemia.

Personnel: Jack Langlos, trumpet; David Bourne, cornet; Mike Baird, clarinet; Dave Kennedy, trombone; Victor de Veritch, violin; Holly Ulyate, flute; Dick Zimmerman, piano; Art Levin, sousaphone; Roy Roten, percussion.

Available @ $5. 25 postpaid ($6. 25 to foreign countries) from The Maple Leaf Club, 5560 West 62nd Street, Los Angeles, California 90056.

Arhoolie 1058 'New Orleans Ragtime Orchestra'

Selections: Creole Belles; Black And White Rag; Purple Rose Of Cairo; Fidgety Feet; Maple Leaf Rag; High Society; The Entertainer; The Ragtime Dance; New Orleans Hop Scop Blues; My Maryland; The Chrysanthemum; Panama.

Personnel: Lionel Ferbos, trumpet; Orange Kellin, clarinet; Paul Crawford, trombone; William Russell, violin; Lars Ivar Edegran, piano; Frank Fields, string bass; John Robichaux, drums.

Atlantic SD 1613 'The Many Faces Of Ragtime; by Turk Murphy's Jazz Band'

Selections: Mississippi Rag; Euphonic Sounds; Original Rags; The Cascades; Pickles And Peppers; Little John's Rag; Grace And Beauty; The Chrysanthemum; Maple Leaf Rag; The Whitewash Man; Dusty Rag; Climax Rag.

Personnel: Leon Oakley, cornet; Phil Howe, clarinet; Turk Murphy, trombone; Pete Clute, piano; Carl Lunsford, banjo; Jim Maihack, tuba; Thad Vanden, drums.

If you have the first Lp by The Dawn Of The Century Ragtime Orchestra (see THE RAGTIMER, Sept. / Oct. 1971), you'll know just what to expect - a rousing program of rags, tunes by prominent ragtime composers, and other material from the ragtime years, all played with zest and skill. The DOTCRO features a brassy, hard-hitting approach and a well-disciplined sound. It all adds up to a satisfying good-humored Lp, and if you don't have their first Lp, you'll get it when you hear this one.

Turk Murphy's first Lp devoted entirely to ragtime has a very similar approach to the music as the DOTCRO. The band moves along easily and lightly on a gentle two-beat, and has that well-rehearsed, unified sound that has always characterized the Murphy band.

Murphy's program is made up entirely of rags and, perhaps because the band is primarily a working jazz band, the best tracks are of the tunes that have the relatively open, loose structure found in the better jazz melodies. 'Mississippi Rag', for example, gets things off to a fine start, and Jean Schwartz's 'Whitewash Man' struts on out with plenty of gusto while remaining basically a ragtime, and not jazz, performance.

On the more intricate tunes, particularly the first four Joplin rags, the band sounds a bit stiffer. 'Euphonic Sounds', for example, is somewhat overarranged, with the melody shifting back and forth between the front line and the piano in a rather distracting manner. However, Pete Clute's rhythmic, clear piano gleams throughout the Lp and goes a long way toward insuring that, if some tracks aren't as good as others, they're all well worth hearing.

I am personally a rabid Murphy fan, and I'd be the first in line to get any of his Lps. While doing my best to discount for this bias, I still come out recommending this Lp to ragtimers as no worse than an A-minus job of full-band ragtime.

The previous Lps by the New Orleans Ragtime Orchestra have not found much favor with this writer (see, e. g. , THE RAGTIMER, Jan. / Feb. 1970). Unlike the DOTCRO, which exhibits the driving approach of a small brass band, the NORO has the subtler style of a small dance band, and draws its repertoire from stock arrangements of ragtime material written during the ragtime years for dance musicians. No one else, to my knowledge, is mining this vein, and the NORO's prior recordings would have been of great interest to ragtimers if the band members had then possessed the skill and cohesion to bring it off properly.

This time out, it's a brand new ball game. Perhaps the musicians realized this, too, because they chose to re-record two of the tunes that appeared on their first Lp. It only takes four bars of comparison to hear the difference - the listless, hesitant introduction to 'Creole Belles' on the earlier version vs. the jaunty, confident performance of the same theme that kicks off this Lp.

Clearly the NORO has found itself. The tunes are taken right up to tempo, the attack is light and sure, and each man fits in his role, resulting in a smoothly-functioning ensemble. There are still some weaknesses, some off-tones and spots where the front line threatens to become unglued - but this time, they're just momentary and don't interfere with the enjoyment of the performances.

The program is good, wisely mixing the intricate rag material with some tunes

more familiar to and compatible with the musicians, most of whom are basically jazzmen. The NORO may not be perfect, but it's turned the corner, and I like its new Lp. I think you will, too.

The presence of the lead instruments on these three Lps requires them to do full-band treatments of the rags. Eliminate those instruments, and you're basically back to a piano solo format, but with the additional pulse of rhythm instruments, as on the following two Lps:

Ethelyn ER 1750 'Ragtime Recycled'

Selections: Agitation Rag; Dallas Blues; Grace And Beauty; Shake That Thing; Cotton Bolls; Chimes Blues; Washboard Wiggles; The Easy Winners; Mountain Top Blues; Cosey Rag; Pride Of The Smokey Row; Bolo Rag; Lonesome Blues; Maple Leaf Rag.

Personnel: Bill Mitchell, piano; Doug Parker, banjo; Paul Woltz, tuba; Hal Smith, Jr., percussion.

Available @ $5. 25 postpaid ($6. 25 to foreign countries) from Bill Mitchell, 13240 Fidler Avenue, Downey, California 90242.

"Messin' Around With 'Ragtime Charlie' Rasch and 'Sister Kate' Ross"

Selections: Choo-Choo; Tulsa Blues; Riverboat Shuffle; Messin' Around; Moonlight And Roses; Oh, Baby (Don't Say 'No' - Say 'Maybe'); Chevy Chase; The Mooche; Kansas City Stomps; Somebody's Wrong; Since My Best Gal Turned Me Down; That Lindy Hop; I Ain't Givin' Nothin' Away.

Available @ $5. 25 postpaid ($6. 25 to foreign countries) from CK Records, 1000 S. 7th Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Not surprisingly, as all four of the participants have been strongly influenced by the West Coast traditional jazz style, Bill Mitchell's Lp of accompanied piano solos is strongly reminiscent of the rags that Wally Rose recorded with the Lu Watters rhythm section in the mid-1940's. And that solid, straight-ahead sound is a good one to be reminded of.

A little over half of the tunes are rags, and you'll find some dandies here that haven't been recorded anywhere near enough. Hunter's masterpiece 'Cotton Bolls' heads this list, with Hampton's 'Agitation Rag' running a close second. And anyone who has the old piano roll recording of it that appeared years ago on Riverside RLP-110 (which I believe has been reissued on the Sounds label) will certainly look forward to renewing acquaintances with 'Pride Of The Smokey Row'.

Mitchell and his cohorts do full justice to these tunes with their happy, stomping performances. A good job.

Charlie Rasch is one of the best ragtime pianists around, playing with clean articulation, rich ideas and plenty of rhythm. His outstanding solo talents are spotlighted in his new Lp on Eubie Blake's rag 'Chevy Chase' ('Kansas City Stomps' is the only other rag on the Lp) and Walter Donaldson's fine old pop tune 'Oh Baby'. On all of the other tracks, Charlie is accompanied on banjo by his long-time colleague, 'Sister Kate' Ross.

The selections are mostly jazz-oriented pieces from the 1920's, fine tunes, many of which are rarely recorded, such as Eubie Blake's lilting 'That Lindy Hop'. If you're only looking for ragtime, though, you'll find a fuller measure of it in Charlie's excellent Lp of piano solos available through The Ragtime Society.

While we're on accompanied and full-band ragtime, a few words should be added about RBF 17 'Ragtime: The City'. This is an anthology Lp made up of fourteen tracks of ragtime-related material recorded during the ragtime years. For space reasons, I won't attempt a detailed listing of the contents, but you'll find some early banjo ragtime (Fred Van Eps, Vess L. Ossman), reissues of piano rolls ('Frog Legs Rag', 'Original Rags'), ragtime by early instrumental groups (Prince's Band, Vic Meyer's Orchestra), etc., plus a few jazz sides that don't really belong here. Recording quality is standard for material of this vintage. Many things of definite interest are included, but probably only to ragtime historians - you don't find yourself coming back to listen repeatedly to an Lp of this type.

There is a companion volume, RBF 18 'Ragtime: The Country', available separately. As the producers recognize, when country musicians 'rag' a medley, they are doing something rather different from what the musicians do who play music of interest to the readers of this publication. I'm no expert on country music, but aside from the fact that most of the tunes on this Lp are of a peppy nature, I find no real common thread in them and, except for a couple-or-three tracks, nothing to suggest that ragtimers, as I know them, would find this record worth buying.

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Something Doing Cont'd from Opposite Page.

BOB SEELEY	- at Charlie's Crab Restaurant & Lounge, 3230 Pine Lake Rd., Orchard Lake, Mich., Mon. thru Sat.
DAN SUMMERS	- and the New Charleston Chasers (with the ODJB sound), Whirlpool St. at Cleveland Ave., Niagara Falls, N. Y., Fri. & Sat. Nights.
TREBOR TICHENOR	- and the Saint Louis Ragtimers can be heard on The Goldenrod Showboat in St. Louis, Missouri.
TERRY WALDO	- at Deibel's Restaurant, German Village, Columbus, Ohio, Wed. & Thurs. Nights.
TEX WYNDHAM	- and The Red Lion Jazz Band, appearing regularly, at The Surry Restaurant, 1100 Philadelphia Pike, Wilmington, Del.
PERFORMERS:	Please keep us posted on your whereabouts and your schedule will appear in this column.

SOMETHING DOING...

JOHN ARPIN - in the Odyssey Lounge at the top of the Hyatt Regency, Toronto, 9:00 p. m. to 1:00 a. m.

EUBIE BLAKE & BILL BOLCOM - Joint Concert, Goodman Theatre, Chicago, Ill., Feb. 5.

"Ragtime" BOB DARCH - at the Silver Rail Tavern, 225 Yonge St., in Toronto, 9:00 p. m. to 1:00 a. m.

DON EWELL - at the Moonraker Club, Oakland Park Blvd (near the ocean) Fort Lauderdale, Florida, with Andy Bartha until May 15.

DAVE FLOWITT - at the Brunswick Hotel, 481 Bloor St. W., with the Climax Jazz Band, Tues. & Wed. 9:00 p. m. to 1:00 a. m.
at Grossman's Tavern, 379 Spadina Ave., with band group, Thurs. 8:30 p. m. to 12:30 a. m.

JOHN MADDOX - at Bon Marche, Tacoma / Seattle, Washington, Mar. 5 to May 5.

KEN MAYHERCY - "Ragtime $ Bill" at Cherry Creek Inn, Denver, Col., Jan 8 to Feb. 17.

MIKE MONTGOMERY - at The Dakota Inn, Rathskeller, Detroit, Mich., Fri. Nights.

MAX MORATH - on the road with his show "At The Turn Of The Century."

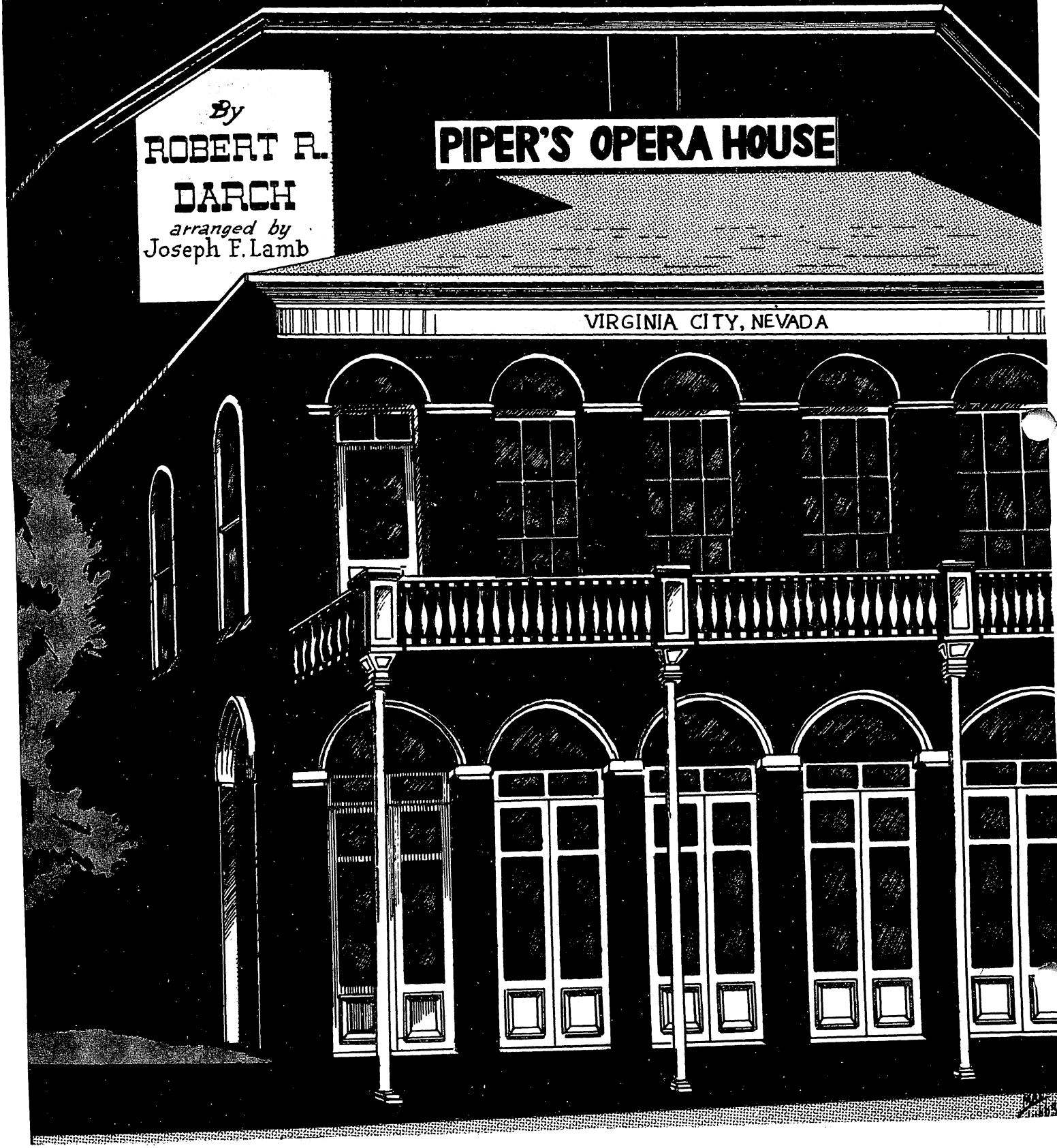
Dr. ELI NEWBERGER - and The New Black Eagle Jazz Band at the Stickey Wicket Pub, West Main St., Hopkinton, Mass. Wed. 7:30 p. m. to 11:30 p. m.

TOM NOEL - on the road with his living portrayal show "Mark Twain At Home". At North Shore Community College, Beverly, Mass. Apr. 5. At Louisiana Tech, Ruston, La. Apr. 10.

CHARLIE RASCH - & "Sister Kate" with the Jacktown Jazz Band, at Bill Cones' Downstairs Saloon, Jackson, Mich., Sat. Nights.

(Continued On Page 22)

OPERA HOUSE RAG

A Sterling Selection

By
ROBERT R. DARCH
arranged by
Joseph F. Lamb